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## **DAY OF TRAGEDIES: 12 killed on Lagos-Ibadan expressway - 2 burnt to death in P/Harcourt fuel fire - Family of 4 dies from generator fumes - Nigerian sentenced to death in China - Robbers kill 7 in bank**

From Kayode Akinmade, Bolaji Ogundele and Hassan Ibrahim – 31.08.2007

TWELVE people, including the driver, were killed in Lagos on Thursday when a trailer truck rammed into the road divider at the old toll-gate. The accident, according to an eyewitness, occurred at about 3.00 a.m.

The driver was said to have lost control of the vehicle, which rammed into the divider, throwing the passengers and goods out of it. The trailer truck was said to have carried a 20-feet container, in which bags of groundnuts, maize, pepper and a Mercedes jeep were placed, and some market women.

A guard at the Lagos State Metropolitan Area Transport Agency (LAMATA), Mr. Isaac Omoniyi, who witnessed the accident, told the Nigerian Tribune that one of the possible causes of the accident was that the driver might have fallen asleep while on the wheel.

Omoniyi, who said the spot at which the accident happened had witnessed several such incidents in the last few months, urged the government to redirect the drainage spot on the old toll-gate. He disclosed that officials of the Lagos State Traffic Management (LASMA) removed the mutilated bodies of the victims and the wreckage of the trailer from the road, adding that the two survivors and the bodies of the victims were taken to Ikeja General Hospital by the agency.

In China, a Chinese court has handed a Nigerian man a suspended death sentence and given a 15-year jail term followed by expulsion to his accomplice, a Ghanaian teenager, Xinhua news agency of China reported on Thursday.

Nigerian Obi Chinedu was arrested last year in the Central Asian border region of Xinjiang after he aroused suspicion when he dashed to the toilet during a routine police inspection of the train he was riding on.

His luggage, which he had thrown out of the train window, was found to contain 415 grammes of heroin, the report said. He was sentenced to death with a two-year suspension.

Ghanaian Martin Offori was arrested on a train from Xinjiang's capital, Urumqi, to the central province of Hubei, after police found more than 3,000 grammes of heroin in his luggage.

The court ruled that the two were involved in a joint drug trafficking operation, the report said, but added that Offori was treated with leniency because he was under 18. It did not give his exact age.

China has launched a "people's war" against drug trafficking, with a series of crackdown campaigns and harsh sentences. In another development, six persons were confirmed dead in two different areas of Rivers State on Thursday with properties worth several millions of naira destroyed in one of the accidents.

One of the accidents was an inferno caused by what was described as illegal siphoning of a petroleum product at Ogale-Nchia, Eleme Local Government Area of the state, by some tanker drivers into fuel tankers.

When the Nigerian Tribune visited the scene of the inferno, which besides destroying many of the shanties in the area, also consumed a multi-million naira Coca Cola plant, it was gathered that two persons were confirmed dead. About seven tankers were consumed by the inferno.

According to an eyewitness, the fire started at about 9:00 p.m. on Wednesday when one of the fuel tankers, suspected to have been loaded with petrol, suddenly went up in flames.

"Before now, most of the tanker drivers loaded condensate, an inferior type of petrol, which happens to be very cheap and whenever they get it like that, they siphon it into the tankers they have kept ready to sell to their customers.

"But the particular one that caught fire last night was suspected to have loaded pure petrol and you know that this is classified as highly inflammable and so it should not be put in anything that

is not well secured, I learnt that a suya seller who was carrying naked fire passed-by the tank and that was how the fire started.

“Two people were found dead. One of them was a four-year-old girl called Anita, and a man. They were burnt beyond recognition. In fact, Anita’s father had to pack his daughter’s ashes from the scene, but their skulls were still preserved”, the witness narrated.

When contacted, the Rivers State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Felix Ogbaudu, confirmed the incidents, saying that police could not confirm the number of casualties on Wednesday, but were able to confirm that two corpses, which were burnt beyond recognition, were recovered from the scene of the inferno.

In another development, four persons — a man called Amos Abaku, his two children and his friend—were suffocated to death in their house in Enugu Waterside, Borokiri area of Port Harcourt, by exhaust fumes from their generator.

The bodies of the deceased, who were said to have died since Monday, were only discovered on Wednesday after several efforts to locate there whereabouts.

According to a source, “their neighbours had noticed their disappearance since Tuesday and had been trying to reach them and their relatives on the phone until the man’s wife had to come down from Okrika. When she came, the door was forced open.

On gaining entry, they saw the bodies of four people, two females and two males. Those who entered the house said they saw the corpse of the owner of the house in the kitchen lying face down, his friend was seen lying on the bed, while his son, whose name was given as Lawrence, was seen by the front door and the daughter found dead at the house’s passage.

Amos Abaku was said to be an ex-Michelin staff member, who was laid off last year when the Port Harcourt factory of the tyre production company ceased operations.

In Kaduna State, about seven people were on Thursday killed by armed robbers who also carted away millions of naira at the Samaru branch of a commercial bank in Zaira.

Eyewitnesses told newsmen that the robbery incident directly opposite the main gate of the Ahmadu Bello University lasted for about 30 minutes.

“A policeman attached to the bank, the manager of a restaurant opposite the university, an okada operator, one girl and two children fell victims to the robbers,” an eyewitness said.

He added that he was inside the bank, standing with the bank manager when the armed robbers entered the bank. “I was standing with the bank manager, discussing, when they came in shouting that everybody should lie down. We immediately obeyed them and then, they asked who the manager is. They took him and went to the vault, demanding the keys.

“He immediately called the girl who had the keys and they opened the safe and took the money inside it. At the time they came, the bullion van had just arrived and the money was being taken to the strong room. So, they intercepted that money and went away.

“They did not touch anybody inside the bank, but I cannot say what led to their killing some people outside. “Students broke my back windscreen and put two bodies inside my car and I took them to ABUTH. They shot the police man attached to the bank from the bank and I can confirm to you that he is dead. They shot another policeman who is presently in the hospital.

“I have always heard the police say that they heard the sound of gun they have never heard before and I always thought they were joking. But I heard that today and now, I believe them.

“My friend, I was lying down in the banking hall and one of the robbers was standing beside me shooting into the air and I thought I was dead. The ground was shaking.

It was when they said let’s go that I knew I was still alive,” the man, said to be a staff member of one of the anti corruption agencies in the country, said.

Other eyewitnesses said that two of the robbers who were apparently leaders of the group were parading the front of the bank and shooting sporadically.